



Opening Statement

June 14, 2013

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Jeff Duncan (R-SC)
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency
Committee on Homeland Security**

“Why Can’t DHS Better Communicate with the American People?”

Remarks as Prepared

Whether it is with Members of Congress, the press, or directly to the American people, 10 years after its establishment, the Department of Homeland Security seems to have developed serious challenges communicating its goals, priorities, tactics, and missions.

This Administration specifically has an increasing sense of a bunker mentality in responding to the public, engaging with stakeholders, and collaborating with industry and advocacy groups. Perhaps more disturbing is the Department’s lackadaisical approach addressing legitimate questions and concerns raised by the American people on a host of issues from TSA’s screening policies to DHS ammunition purchases, to the impact the Sequester would have on the Department and its components.

When DHS officials or their colleagues at the components do respond to legitimate questions concerning Departmental policy or actions, responses are often defensive and condescending. I found this out first hand when I raised serious visa security issues with Secretary Napolitano in April only to be told that my question was not worthy of an answer because – and I quote “It is so full with misstatements and misapprehensions that it’s just not worthy of an answer.” That is a heck of a way to speak to a Member of Congress who represents almost 700,000 American taxpayers who help foot the Department’s \$60 billion budget.

DHS’s inability to connect with the American people has been a running theme through the first four Oversight Subcommittee hearings we have held so far this Congress. Former Governor of Virginia and Chairman of the Gilmore Commission, Jim Gilmore, raised concerns with DHS’s ability to share

information at our February Subcommittee hearing. He said that one of the primary goals of the Department should be to have an actual discussion with the American people.

The inability of DHS to sufficiently address concerns raised by the general public – or even to engage in a discussion – erodes trust in the Department, and that is my concern. An uncommunicative Department of Homeland Security that is seen as consistently stonewalling increases people’s skepticism of DHS, strains the institution’s credibility, and makes people question the motivations of the Department’s leadership. How does this serve DHS’s critical mission to defend the homeland?

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 calls on the Secretary of the Department to ensure that information related to domestic incidents is gathered and shared with the public, the private sector, and with state and local authorities. To this end, FEMA uses a variety of tools to communicate with the public on disaster response and emergency preparedness.

But it is disappointing to me that a country that leads the world in effective advertising and marketing cannot be as effective in communicating with its own citizenry on even the most basic of policies related to homeland security. For example:

- DHS ignored questions regarding the Department’s ammunition purchases for weeks, if not months. The Secretary acknowledged in the Committee’s April hearing on DHS’s budget that the Department could have gotten ahead of the ball on this issue. However, the prolonged silence led many in the public to come up their own conclusions and scoff at the official DHS explanation.
- In February 2013, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) released about 2,000 illegal aliens into communities across Texas and the United States without rhyme or reason, only to subsequently blame the effects of Sequestration, despite the fact that it had yet to go into effect.
- DHS aggressively and proudly promotes its “See Something Say Something” campaign, including at events all over the country attended by Secretary Napolitano. Yet a DHS-sponsored report released only hours before the Boston Marathon bombings found that almost 60 percent of Americans said they’d never heard anything about the program.
- DHS’s Blue Campaign which seeks to promote public awareness of human trafficking within the U.S. could also be a game changer if DHS did a better job communicating its message and working with key stakeholders.

Undoubtedly, social media has changed the game for the federal government in terms of the number of outlets and issues it has to be aware of and responsive to. However, federal agencies now have unprecedented opportunities to interact with the very people they serve on a daily basis, which is critical when it concerns matters of health, safety, and emergency response.

I often use social media to communicate with my constituents and know that DHS also has an array of social media. My question is: How does DHS or the components decide which issues are worthy of a response or exactly what information is important enough to push to the general public? What exactly is the Department's strategy in communicating its missions and policies?

For instance, TSA's Twitter account could be a boon for the agency in pushing out real time information to travelers, or in clearly communicating travel tips to expedite air travel screening. Instead, you find Tweets about "Travel Tips for Campers and Fishers" and "TSA's Weirdest Finds." As Douglas Pinkham, one of our witnesses here today, explained in his prepared testimony: "Social media programs should be launched because they represent the highest strategic use of corporate resources, not because everyone else seems to have a social media program."

It seems to me that more than a decade after the September 11th attacks, and especially in light of April's Boston Marathon bombings, that the American people are resilient and receptive and more than willing to do their part in securing the homeland. It is my hope that the Department will try to work to capitalize on this through enhancing its responsiveness and communication with the public and their stakeholders. Doing so would enhance DHS's credibility, build trust, and strengthen the relationship between the Department and the American people.

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